

November 30, 2008 - Murtha Op-Ed on American Diabetes Month

The following Op-Ed appeared in the Tribune-Democrat (11/26/08) and the Observer-Reporter/Indiana Gazette (11/30/08):

By Congressman John P. Murtha (PA-12)

There is a diabetes epidemic in this country, and over the past decade we have seen an alarming rise in the number of people diagnosed with the disease.

Today, there are more than 23 million Americans diagnosed with diabetes. This includes nearly 800,000 Pennsylvanians, 40,500 in the 12th Congressional District alone.

Diabetes is a disease without boundaries. It doesn't matter what country you live in, what ethnic background you come from, or how much money you have in your pocket. It can affect us all.

Diabetes places physical and emotional strains on individuals and their families. Once diagnosed, diabetes becomes a 24/7 responsibility and the entire family becomes involved with managing the disease. If left undiagnosed or untreated, serious health complications can arise.

The medical costs for treating diabetes are staggering. On average, those with diabetes spend \$10,000 more per year on medical care than those without diabetes. Last year, diabetes cost the United States \$174 billion in excess medical expenditures and lost productivity, a 32 percent increase from 2002. Here in the 12th Congressional District, the medical and indirect costs added up to \$366 million last year.

We must reverse this epidemic. November is American Diabetes Month. It is a time to raise awareness, to promote the importance of diet and exercise, and to support proper diabetes management and care.

In 2004, I started directing federal funds for programs aimed at combating diabetes both in the military and in Western Pennsylvania. With the help of local partnerships, and \$135 million in federal funding, we are fighting diabetes through research, education and outreach programs.

At the University
of Pittsburgh Diabetes

Institute, diabetes experts are examining the lifestyle factors and choices of type 2 diabetics. Type 2 diabetes is the most common form of diabetes and occurs when the body does not produce enough insulin or the cells ignore insulin. A poor diet and lack of exercise, which contribute to a growing rate of obesity, are key factors in the rise of type 2 diabetes nationally. The Pittsburgh Regional Initiative for Diabetes Education (PRIDE), a program created by the Diabetes Institute, is fighting these factors by developing education and outreach tools and placing diabetes educators and dietitians within our rural hospitals and primary care practices. This allows one-on-one training of medical staff and personalized consultations and care for patients.

The PRIDE program currently reaches patients in seven Pennsylvania counties.

In the Tribune-Democrat:

In Cambria, the Conemaugh Health System-PRIDE partnership offers patients a comprehensive outpatient educational program at Memorial Medical Center's Lee Campus. Certified diabetes educators offer one-on-one counseling and classes on meal and nutrition planning, blood glucose monitoring, exercise instruction, review of medications, etc. They also offer a free monthly support program that allows patients to interact with specialists and other diabetics. The Tribune-Democrat recently profiled a Johnstown woman who lost 30 pounds by taking advantage of the hospital's wellness programs. These are the types of successes we are after.

In the Indiana-Gazette:

In Indiana County, the Indiana Regional Medical Center-PRIDE partnership offers patients a comprehensive outpatient educational program. Certified diabetes educators offer one-on-one counseling and classes on meal and nutrition planning, blood glucose monitoring, lifestyle changes, etc. They also offer a free bimonthly support program that allows patients to interact with specialists and other diabetics.

In the Observer-Reporter:

In Washington and Greene Counties, the PRIDE program partners with Washington Hospital and the Centerville Clinics to offer patients a comprehensive outpatient educational program. Certified diabetes educators offer one-on-one and group classes on meal and nutrition planning, blood glucose monitoring, behavior modifications, exercise and weight management, and stress management. They also have a free monthly support group that allows patients to interact with specialists and other diabetics.

At Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC, researchers have begun human clinical trials to cure type 1 diabetes. Type 1 diabetes occurs when the body does not produce insulin and is usually diagnosed in children and young adults. Dr. Massimo Trucco and his team have successfully "cured" type 1 diabetes in mice and have discovered that type 1 diabetes may be triggered by a common virus in children who are genetically predisposed to the disease. Their research involves extracting cells of an

individual, engineering these cells to produce insulin, and transplanting these new insulin producing cells back into the body.

We are making progress, but obvious challenges remain. It took decades and a national campaign to convince people of the adverse health affects from smoking, and today the numbers of U.S. adults who smoke are at record lows. It's not as easy to convince people to maintain a healthy diet and exercise plan, but this is where we must start.

I urge you to talk to your doctor, create a diet and exercise plan, and take advantage of the programs offered throughout our area. Together, we can reverse the spread of diabetes.